

WATCHABLE WILDLIFE PROJECT

There is a great opportunity in Arizona to significantly increase organized recreational wildlife viewing, an effort commonly known as Watchable Wildlife (WW). In the past the Department has been very active with WW efforts. However, these efforts were generally carried out relatively independently by Regional field offices and the Information and Education Division. In January 2006, the Department initiated a WW administrative oversight position based out of the Nongame Branch. The position is tasked with coordinating activities across the state, including providing a central clearinghouse for the exchange of information, providing logistical support, acting as facilitator for specific projects, sponsor training sessions, assisting and advising Department programs on WW project issues and opportunities. This broad, programmatic approach will involve collaboration between many Departmental programs and activities as well as numerous external cooperators.

Statewide, the WW project strives to increase public awareness of, and support for, wildlife through managed wildlife viewing-related recreational and educational opportunities, while not lessening existing hunting and fishing opportunity. Emphasizing the ethical use of the resource by the public assures the positive wildlife viewing experience for all user groups is sustained for the future. Wildlife viewing recreationists are a diverse group of users; many have differing experience expectations. The Department's WW project seeks to increase the chances of satisfying those expectations by offering various viewing experiences in a format that allows for the sharing of important wildlife management information and recognition of the Department's management role.

Guest ranches and some private nature preserves cater to nature enthusiasts. Commercial tourism also targets Arizona for natural history and wildlife viewing every year. Towns throughout the State benefit economically from wildlife viewing. Foremost among the wildlife viewing users are birdwatchers. Each year thousands of residents and nonresidents search for birds in Arizona, especially rare species that occur nowhere else in the United States. There is also considerable educational demand for wildlife statewide. As the desire to view wildlife increases, it has become necessary to manage wildlife and wildlife viewing recreation (human dimensions) to ensure the resource is not negatively impacted and the activity remains sustainable for future generations.

There are five areas of emphasis that will drive WW at the statewide level: 1) Partnerships, 2) Outreach and Education, 3) Technical and Financial Assistance, 4) Research and Marketing, and 5) Site Development. Each of these strategies is operationally described in the Operational Approaches.

OPERATIONAL APPROACHES

The Department's formal WW effort is in the development stage, therefore many of the operational approaches are to be determined and project foundations are being established throughout the state. This document is an early blueprint for the project. With input and involvement of Departmental work units, WW is a concerted effort to increase wildlife viewing opportunities statewide and enhance the experience for the visitor while managing wildlife and the activities of the public to maintain sustainable levels for use of the resource.

Partnerships

Maximize budgets by creating strong, sustainable partnerships with all appropriate public and private entities to create involvement and multi-ownership in wildlife projects by all potential partners. Such partnerships would also involve a large network of various connections to receive information on projects, activities, and opportunities that will enhance WW.

1. Create strong, sustainable partnerships (1.B.2, 2.D.1-3)
 - State/Federal agencies (e.g. ASP, ASLD, USFWS, BLM, etc.)
 - NGOs (e.g. Wildlife for Tomorrow, Watchable Wildlife, Inc., Audubon, etc.)
 - Actively support the Arizona Watchable Wildlife Tourism Association (AWWTA) to promote wildlife viewing in Arizona.
 - Strengthen the new Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) partnership regarding the installation of wildlife viewing-related signs along roadways.
 - Support Arizona Birding/wildlife viewing trail development via partnerships (ABCI, ATA, Audubon)
 - Develop the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT) partnership into a cornerstone of the project. Continue to strengthen relationships with State and local offices of tourism, chambers of commerce, Convention and Visitor Bureaus, etc.
 - Encourage and support existing wildlife festivals as well as actively advancing development of five *new* festivals and other community outreach opportunities that promote wildlife viewing.
2. Collaborate with various Department Programs as sources for combining efforts for appropriate activities. (1.B.1, 1.B.5, 2.A.5)

Outreach and Education

Use interpretation and development activities for wildlife sites to inform and educate visitors, communities and vendors on wildlife identification, behavior, management and ethical viewing activities and practices that attract wildlife. Offer passive wildlife viewing strategies (i.e. information or directions given about where people might see WL, how to ethically watch, interpretive/educational information, tracking visitor satisfaction, etc.).

1. Maintain key role in planning the 2007 National Watchable Wildlife Conference (2.A.3, 2.A.5)
2. Coordinate with I&E to develop a communication plan including promotional materials and campaigns emphasizing wildlife viewing and related opportunities (1.B.1, 1.B.5, 2.A.3, 2.A.5).
3. Develop the new *Arizona Wildlife Viewing Guide* into one of the cornerstones of WW and utilize it as an outreach opportunity both online and in print for purchase. Market wildlife viewing in AZ using the guide and AOT tools. (1.B.5, 1.B.9, 2.A.3, 2.A.5)

4. Develop interpretation activities for wildlife sites (specifically Department Wildlife Areas including Quigley, Upper Verde, White Water Draw, Cluff, Section 10 and Base and Meridian) to inform and educate visitors and communities on biological/ecological themes and ethical viewing activities and practices that ensure sustainability of the wildlife (1.B.5, 1.B.9, 2.A.3)
5. Develop programs to educate travel-oriented groups, economic development groups, land-owners/managers, homeowners and civic/conservation groups about the value of Arizona's wildlife and habitat (1.B.4, 1.B.5, 2.A.3, 2.A.5, 2.D.3)
6. Using materials developed for training Department personnel, develop a training program to educate and inform local government, state and federal agency staff about wildlife viewing and site enhancement opportunities. (1.B.5, 2.A.5)
7. Develop presentations/displays for conferences, workshops, and other activities to increase awareness of the Watchable Wildlife Project (including Department Regional meetings, festivals, AOT and Economic Development conferences, etc.) (1.B.5, 2.A.3, 2.A.5)
8. Coordinate various Department Programs statewide to develop and schedule events to highlight specific wildlife and areas (1.B.5, 1.B.9, 2.A.3)
9. Continue collaboration with the Nongame Bat Project and Regions on statewide awareness and appreciation activities. (1.B.1, 1.B.52.A.5)
10. Coordinate with the Nongame Black-footed Ferret Project and Region III to develop a sensitive plan to highlight the Aubry Valley/Seligman wildlife viewing opportunities. (1.B.1, 1.B.5, 2.A.5)
11. Utilize the new MOU with ADOT to allow highway signs to be displayed to identify designated Watchable Wildlife sites, and install interpretive/educational signs at highway rest areas and pull outs statewide (1.B.52.A.3, 2.A.5, 2.D.3)

Technical and Financial Assistance

Identify needs and opportunities to provide managed wildlife viewing recreational opportunities, participant safety, conservation and protection of the wildlife being viewed. Find new funding sources that are both stable and adequate to fund the Department's role in meeting the public mandate as well as advising municipalities, communities, and organizations on the availability of funds from outside sources.

1. Sponsor a Watchable Wildlife workshop (industry, community or species-specific) in alternate years in various parts of the state. (1.B.4, 1.B.5, 2.A.5, 2.D.1, 2.D.3)
2. Present wildlife viewing basics workshops in each Region (1.B.5, 1.B.9, 2.A.5)

3. Provide consultation and guidance internally and to communities and organizations to educate and inform about wildlife viewing and site enhancement opportunities (1.B.4, 2.A.3, 2.A.5)
4. Develop a financial assistance program to allow local communities and nonprofit organizations an opportunity to obtain funding for assistance with development of five *new* festivals and other community efforts in wildlife-oriented recreation (1.B.2, 1.B.5, 2.A.3, 2.D.1, 3.A.6)
5. Develop a financial assistance program to allow local communities and nonprofit organizations an opportunity to obtain funding for capital projects and site enhancements that are not on Department properties. (1.B.2, 1.B.5, 2.A.3, 3.A.6)
6. Develop and provide financial assistance through grants, agreements and collaboration opportunities to support Watchable Wildlife activities on Department owned/managed properties (i.e. Wildlife Areas) and external interests. (1.A.6, 2.D.1, 2.D.3, 3.A.6)

Research and Marketing

Market Arizona as a quality wildlife viewing destination to increase travel to viewing locations throughout the state including Department owned/managed properties (e.g. Wildlife areas). Assist communities with recognizing the benefits of wildlife-related recreation. Collect valid, reliable and credible information on the economic impact of wildlife viewing activities in Arizona along with continued monitoring of the impacts of viewing activities on the wildlife and habitat.

1. Assist AOT in developing a marketing plan to highlight Arizona as a quality wildlife viewing destination. To augment the effort, offer workshops to assist communities with recognizing the economic benefits of wildlife-related recreation. (1.B.5, 2.A.3)
2. Coordinate with various Department Programs to develop a Watchable Wildlife site-database beginning with the new *Arizona Wildlife Viewing Guide*. (1.B.5, 2.A.3, 2.A.5)
3. Coordinate with I&E to develop interactive web map (partner with AOT, AWWTA) to market the state as a premium wildlife viewing destination (1.B.5, 2.D.1, 2.D.3)
4. Coordinate with Responsive Management to develop new/evaluate old statewide survey(s) to determine visitor preference for wildlife viewing enhancement, facility and program preferences, and to help define specific projects (1.A.6, 1.B.5, 2.A.3, 2.A.5)
5. Coordinate with Responsive Management to conduct economic impact research to evaluate benefits and opportunities. (1.A.6, 2.A.3, 2.A.5)
6. Collect valid, reliable and credible information on the impacts of viewing activities on the wildlife and habitat. (1.A.1, 1.A.6)

Site Development

Develop sites to safely accommodate viewers and wildlife, with appropriate amenities such as viewing blinds, restrooms, parking, fencing and habitat improvements that attract wildlife. Offer active wildlife viewing strategies (including developments to enhance likelihood of seeing wildlife).

1. Assist GF Regions with developing and implementing GF Wildlife Area Management Plans that highlight WW concepts and activities and making the areas more accessible to the public (template plans: White Water Draw WA, Gila River System WAs) (1.A.3, 1.A.6, 1.B.2, 1.B.4, 2.D.1, 2.D.3)
2. Develop sites to accommodate viewers and wildlife, with appropriate amenities including developments to enhance likelihood of seeing wildlife at a given location and/or season (e.g. habitat improvements, osprey/raptor nesting/perch platforms, spotting scopes, etc.). (1.A.1, 1.A.5, 1.B.1, 1.B)
3. Use a variety of options available to develop viewing areas (e.g. wildlife trails, interpretive signs/informational kiosks, wildlife viewing blinds for various customers – photographers, artists, etc.) (1.B.1, 1.B.2, 1.B.4, 1.B.5, 2.A.3)
4. Coordinate with the Nongame Bird Project to continue development of the statewide birding trail system (1.B.1, 1.B.5, 2.A.5)
5. Coordinate with various Department Programs to evaluate installation of wildcams to allow non-invasive, remote wildlife viewing. (1.B.2, 1.B.4)

LINKAGES TO OTHER OPERATIONAL PLANS

Business Administration Program:

Develop a financial assistance program to allow local communities and nonprofit organizations an opportunity to obtain funding for assistance with development of festivals and other community efforts in wildlife-oriented recreation.

- Develop and provide financial assistance through grants, agreements and collaboration opportunities to support wildlife viewing activities, both in- and out-of-house
- Coordinate with Responsive Management to develop statewide/local surveys to determine visitor preference for enhancements, facilities, and programs
- Economic impact research

Game Subprogram:

Coordinate to evaluate installation of wildcams to allow non-invasive, remote wildlife viewing.

- Species-specific wildlife viewing methods: all game animal viewing opportunities

Information Project:

Coordinate to develop and schedule events to highlight specific wildlife and areas.

- Coordinate to evaluate installation of wildcams to allow non-invasive, remote wildlife viewing.

- Develop programs to educate travel-oriented groups, economic development groups, land-owners/managers, homeowners, civic/conservation groups and school groups about the value of Arizona's wildlife and habitat.
- Develop WW communication plan including responsible wildlife viewing recreational use, impacts on wildlife and resources, courtesy, private property, etc.
- Living responsibly with wildlife (urban issues) – Web site, brochures, articles, interviews, etc.

Education Project:

Increase public awareness, support and involvement in WW; identify, assess, develop and promote wildlife viewing opportunities

Habitat Project:

Inclusion of WW issues, concerns, opportunities in habitat project evaluation as well as inclusion in the LANS Program efforts.

Wildlife Areas Project:

Develop sites to accommodate viewers and wildlife, with appropriate amenities including developments to enhance likelihood of seeing wildlife at a given location and/or season (e.g. habitat improvements, osprey/raptor nesting/perch platforms, spotting scopes, etc.).

- Use a variety of options available to develop viewing areas (e.g. wildlife trails, interpretive signs/informational kiosks, wildlife viewing blinds for various customers – photographers, artists, etc.)

Research Project:

Monitor impacts of viewing activities on wildlife and habitat.

Law Enforcement Project:

WW benefits from support received from the Law Enforcement Branch (LEB) in that both help to educate the public and increase voluntary compliance. WW and LEB can coordinate to proactively discuss outreach and education needs.